











# THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

By  
SRI AUROBINDO GHOSE

September, 1920

**Prabartak Publishing House**  
CHANDERNAGORE.

Published by  
**Rameshwar De**  
from the  
**Prabartak Publishing House**  
*CHANDERNAGORE.*

PRINTED BY  
**A. C. SARKAR**  
AT BRAHMO MISSION PRESS,  
211, CORNWALLIS ST., CALCUTTA.

*The subject matter of the book was written in a way of appreciation of Mr James H. Cousins book of the same name, and was published in the August, September, October and November issues of Arya 1918.*





# **Books by Sri Aurobindo Ghose**

## **UTTARPARA SPEECH**

2nd Edition

*Price As. 4.*

---

## **IN BENGALI**

### **AUROBINDER PATRA**

Letters of Sri Aurobindo to his wife.

3rd Edition

*Price As. 6.*

---

### **DHARMA-O-JATIATA**

Articles about religion and nationalism

*Price Rs. 1-8-0.*

---

### **GITA**

Essays on the Gita

*Price Rs. 1-4-0.*

**Published by the Prabartak Publishing House.**



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

### I

**T**HERE has been recently some talk of a Renaissance in India. A number of illuminating essays with that general title and subject have been given to us by a poet and subtle critic and thinker, Mr. James H. Cousins, and others have touched suggestively various sides of the growing movement towards a new life and a new thought that may well seem to justify the description. This Renaissance, this new birth in India, if it is a fact, must become a thing of immense importance both to herself and the world, to herself because of all that is meant for her in the recovery or the change of her

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

time-old spirit and national ideals, to the world because of the possibilities involved in the rearing of a force that is in many respects unlike any other and its genius very different from the mentality and spirit that have hitherto governed the modern idea in mankind, although not so far away perhaps from that which is preparing to govern the future. It is rather the first point of view that I shall put forward at present : for the question what India means to make of her own life must precede the wider question what her new life may mean to the human race. And it is besides likely to become before long an issue of a pressing importance.

There is a first question, whether at all there is really a Renaissance in India. That depends a good deal on what we mean by the word ; it depends also on the future, for the thing itself is only in its infancy and it is too 'early to say to what it may lead'. The word carries the mind back to the turning-point of

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

European culture to which it was first applied ; that was not so much a reawakening as an overturn and reversal, a seizure of Christianised, Teutonised, feudalised Europe by the old Graeco-Latin spirit and form with all the complex and momentous results which came from it. That is certainly not a type of renaissance that is at all possible in India. There is a closer resemblance to the recent Celtic movement in Ireland, the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding : in Ireland this was discovered by a return to the Celtic spirit and culture after a long period of eclipsing English influences, and in India something of the same kind of movement is appearing and has especially taken a pronounced turn since the political outburst of 1905. But even here the analogy does not give the whole truth.

We have to see moreover that the

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

whole is at present a great formless chaos of conflicting influences with a few luminous points of formation here and there where a new self-consciousness has come to the surface. But it cannot be said that these forms have yet a sufficient hold on the general mind of the people. They represent an advance movement ; they are the voices of the vanguard, the torchlights of the pioneers. On the whole what we see is a giant Shakti who awakening into a new world, a new and alien environment, finds herself shackled in all her limbs by a multitude of gross or minute bonds, bonds self-woven by her past, bonds recently imposed from outside, and is struggling to be free from them, to arise and proclaim herself, to cast abroad her spirit and set her seal on the world. We hear on every side a sound of the slow fraying of bonds, here and there a sharp tearing and snapping ; but freedom of movement has not yet been attained. The eyes are not yet clear, the

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

bud of the soul has only partly opened. The Titaness has not yet arisen.

Mr. Cousins puts the question in his book whether the word renaissance at all applies since India has always been awake and stood in no need of reawakening. There is a certain truth behind that and to one coming in with a fresh mind from outside and struck by the living continuity of past and present India, it may be especially apparent; but that is not quite how we can see it who are her children and are still suffering from the bitter effects of the great decline which came to a head in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Undoubtedly there was a period, a brief but very disastrous period of the dwindling of that great fire of life, even a moment of incipient disintegration, marked politically by the anarchy which gave European adventure its chance, inwardly by an increasing torpor of the creative spirit in religion and art,—science and philosophy and in-



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

tellectual knowledge had long been dead or petrified into a mere scholastic Punditism,—all pointing to a nadir of setting energy, the evening-time from which according to the Indian idea of the cycles a new age has to start. It was that moment and the pressure of a superimposed European culture which followed it that made the reawakening necessary.

We have practically to take three facts into consideration, the great past of Indian culture and life with the moment of inadapative torpor into which it had lapsed, the first period of the Western contact in which it seemed for a moment likely to perish by slow decomposition, and the ascending movement which first broke into some clarity of expression only a decade or two ago. Mr. Cousins has his eye fixed on Indian spirituality which has always maintained itself even in the decline of the national vitality ; it was certainly that which saved India always at every critical moment of her destiny, and it has

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

been the starting-point too of her renaissance. Any other nation under the same pressure would have long ago perished soul and body. But certainly the outward members were becoming gangrened ; the powers of renovation seemed for a moment to be beaten by the powers of stagnation, and stagnation is death. Now that the salvation, the reawakening has come, India will certainly keep her essential spirit, will keep her characteristic soul, but there is likely to be a great change of the body. The shaping for itself of a new body, of new philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political, social forms by the same soul rejuvenescent will, I should think, be the type of the Indian renaissance,—forms not contradictory of the truths of life which the old expressed, but rather expressive of those truths restated, cured of defect, completed.

What was this ancient spirit and characteristic soul of India ? European writers, struck by the general metaphysical bent

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

of the Indian mind, by its strong religious instincts and religious idealism, by its other-worldliness are inclined to write as if this were all the Indian spirit. An abstract, metaphysical, religious mind overpowered by the sense of the infinite, not apt for life, dreamy, unpractical, turning away from life and action as Maya, this, they said, is India ; and for a time Indians in this, as in other matters submissively echoed their new western teachers and masters. They learned to speak with pride of their metaphysics, of their literature, of their religion, but in all else they were content to be learners and imitators. Since then Europe has discovered that there was too an Indian art of remarkable power and beauty ; but the rest of what India meant it has hardly at all seen. But meanwhile the Indian mind began to emancipate itself and to look upon its past with a clear and self-discerning eye, and it very soon discovered that it had been misled into an

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

entirely false self-view. All such one-sided appreciations indeed almost invariably turn out to be false. Was it not the general misconception about Germany at one time, because she was great in philosophy and music, but had blundered in life and been unable to make the most of its materials, that this was a nation of unpractical dreamers, idealists, crudites and sentimentalists, patient, docile and industrious certainly, but politically inapt,—“admirable, ridiculous Germany”? Europe has had a terrible awakening from that error. When the renaissance of India is complete, she will have an awakening, not of the same brutal kind, certainly, but startling enough, as to the real nature and capacity of the Indian spirit.

Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning,—and, even in her ages of reason and her age of increasing ignorance, she

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

never lost hold of the insight,—that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities. She was alive to the greatness of material laws and forces ; she had a keen eye for the importance of the physical sciences ; she knew how to organise the arts of ordinary life. But she saw that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical ; she saw that the complexity of the universe could not be explained in the present terms of man or seen by his superficial sight, that there were other powers behind, other powers within man himself of which he is normally unaware, that he is conscious only of a small part of himself, that the invisible always surrounds the visible, the suprasensible the sensible, even as infinity always surrounds the finite. She saw too that man has the power of exceeding himself, of becoming himself more entirely and profoundly than he is,—truths which

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

have only recently begun to be seen in Europe and seem even now too great for its common intelligence. She saw the myriad gods beyond man, God beyond the gods, and beyond God his own ineffable eternity; she saw that there were ranges of life beyond our life, ranges of mind beyond our present mind and above these she saw the splendours of the spirit. Then with that calm audacity of her intuition which knew no fear or littleness and shrank from no act whether of spiritual or intellectual, ethical or vital courage, she declared that there was none of these things which man could not attain if he trained his will and knowledge; he could conquer these ranges of mind, become the spirit, become a god, become one with God, become the ineffable Brahman. And with the logical practicality and sense of science and organised method which distinguished her mentality, she set forth immediately to find out the way. Hence from long ages of this insight and

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

practice there was ingrained in her her spirituality, her powerful psychic tendency, her great yearning to grapple with the infinite and possess it, her ineradicable religious sense, her idealism, her Yoga, the constant turn of her art and her philosophy.

But this was not and could not be her whole mentality, her entire spirit; spirituality itself does not flourish on earth in the void, even as our mountaintops do not rise like those of an enchantment of dream out of the clouds without a base. When we look at the past of India, what strikes us next is her stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her almost unimaginably prolific creativeness. For three thousand years at least,—it is indeed much longer,—she has been creating abundantly and incessantly, lavishly, with an inexhaustible many-sidedness, republics and kingdoms and empires, philosophies and cosmogonies and sciences and creeds and arts and

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

poems and all kinds of monuments, palaces and temples and public works, communities and societies and religious orders. laws and codes and rituals, physical sciences, psychic sciences, systems of Yoga, systems of politics and administration, arts spiritual, arts worldly, trades, industries, fine crafts,—the list is endless and in each item there is almost a plethora of activity. She creates and creates and is not satisfied and is not tired ; she will not have an end of it, seems hardly to need a space for rest, a time for inertia and lying fallow. She expands too outside her borders ; her ships cross the ocean and the fine superfluity of her wealth brims over to Judaea and Egypt and Rome ; her colonies spread her arts and epics and creeds in the Archipelago ; her traces are found in the sands of Mesopotamia ; her religions conquer China and Japan and spread westward as far as Palestine and Alexandria, and the figures of the Upanishads and the sayings of



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

the Buddhists are reechoed on the lips of Christ. Everywhere, as on her soil, so in her works there is the teeming of a superabundant energy of life. European critics complain that in her ancient architecture, sculpture and art there is no reticence, no holding back of riches, no blank spaces, that she labours to fill every rift with ore, occupy every inch with plenty. Well, but defect or no, that is the necessity of her superabundance of life, of the teeming of the infinite within her. She lavishes her riches because she must, as the Infinite fills every inch of space with the stirring of life and energy because it is the Infinite,

But this supreme spirituality and this prolific abundance of the energy and joy of life and creation do not make all that the spirit of India has been in its past. It is not a confused splendour of tropical vegetation under heavens of a pure sapphire infinity. It is only to eyes unaccustomed to such wealth that there

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

seems to be a confusion in this crowding of space with rich forms of life, a luxurious disorder of excess or a wanton lack of measure, clear balance and design. For the third power of the ancient Indian spirit was a strong intellectuality, at once austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail. Its chief impulse was that of order and arrangement, but an order founded upon a seeking for the inner law and truth of things and having in view always the possibility of conscientious practice. India has been pre-eminently the land of the Dharma and the Shashtra. She searched for the inner truth and law of each human or cosmic activity, its dharma; that found, she laboured to cast into elaborate form and detailed law of arrangement its application in fact and rule of life. Her first period was luminous with the discovery of the Spirit; her second completed the discovery of the Dharma; her third elaborated into

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

detail the first simpler formulation of the Shāstra; but none was exclusive, the three elements are always present.

In this third period the curious elaboration of all life into a science and an art assumes extraordinary proportions. The mere mass of the intellectual production during the period from Asoka well into the Mahomedan epoch is something truly prodigious, as can be seen at once if one studies the account which recent scholarship gives of it, and we must remember that that scholarship as yet only deals with a fraction of what is still lying extant and what is extant is only a small percentage of what was once written and known. There is no historical parallel for such an intellectual labour and activity before the invention of printing and the facilities of modern science; yet all that mass of research and production and curiosity of detail was accomplished without these facilities and with no better record than the memory

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

and for an aid the perishable palm-leaf. Nor was all this colossal literature confined to philosophy and theology, religion and Yoga, logic and rhetoric and grammar and linguistics, poetry and drama, medicine and astronomy and the sciences ; it embraced all life, politics and society, all the arts from painting to dancing, all the sixty-four accomplishments, everything then known that could be useful to life or interesting to the mind, even, for instance, to such practical side minutiae as the breeding and training of horses and elephants, each of which had its Shastra and its art, its apparatus of technical terms, its copious literature. In each subject from the largest and most momentous to the smallest and most trivial there was expended the same all-embracing, opulent, minute and thorough intellectuality. On one side there is an insatiable curiosity, the desire of life to know itself in every detail, on the other a spirit of organisation and scrupulous

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

order, the desire of the mind to tread through life with a harmonised knowledge and in the right rhythm and measure. Thus an ingrained and dominant spirituality, an inexhaustible vital creativeness and gust of life and, mediating between them, a powerful, penetrating and scrupulous intelligence combined of the rational, ethical and aesthetic mind each at a high intensity of action, created the harmony of the ancient Indian culture.

Indeed without this opulent vitality and opulent intellectuality India could never have done so much as she did with her spiritual tendencies. It is a great error to suppose that spirituality flourishes best in an impoverished soil with the life half-killed and the intellect discouraged and intimidated. The spirituality that so flourishes is something morbid, hectic and exposed to perilous reactions. It is when the race has lived most richly and thought most profoundly that spiritua-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

lity finds its heights and its depths and its constant and many-sided fruition. In modern Europe it is after a long explosion of vital force and a stupendous activity of the intellect that spirituality has begun really to emerge and with some promise of being not, as it once was, the sorrowful physician of the malady of life, but the beginning of a large and profound clarity. The European eye is struck in Indian spiritual thought by the Buddhistic and illusionist denial of life. But it must be remembered that this is only one side of its philosophic tendency which assumed exaggerated proportions only in the period of decline. In itself too that was simply one result, in one direction, of a tendency of the Indian mind which is common to all its activities, the impulse to follow each motive, each specialisation of motive even, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, vital, to its extreme point and to sound its utmost possibility. Part of its innate direction was to seek in each not

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

only for its fullness of detail, but for its infinite, its absolute, its profoundest depth or its highest pinnacle. It knew that without a "fine excess" we cannot break down the limits which the dull temper of the normal mind opposes to knowledge and thought and experience; and it had in seeking this point a boundless courage and yet a sure tread. Thus it carried each tangent of philosophic thought, each line of spiritual experience to its farthest point, and chose to look from that farthest point, at all existence, so as to see what truth or power such a view could give it. It tried to know the whole of divine nature and to see too as high as it could beyond nature and into whatever there might be of supradivine. When it formulated a spiritual atheism, it followed that to its acme of possible vision. When, too, it indulged in materialistic atheism,—though it did that only with a side glance, as the freak of an insatiable intellectual curiosity,—yet it formulated it straight

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

out, boldly and nakedly, without the least concession to idealism or ethicism.

Everywhere we find this tendency. The ideals of the Indian mind have included the height of self-assertion of the human spirit and its thirst of independence and mastery and possession and the height also of its self-abnegation, dependence and submission and self-giving. In life the ideal of opulent living and the ideal of poverty were carried to the extreme of regal splendour and the extreme of satisfied nudity. Its intuitions were sufficiently clear and courageous not to be blinded by its own most cherished ideas and fixed habits of life. If it was obliged to stereotype caste as the symbol of its social order, it never quite forgot, as the caste-spirit is apt to forget, that the human soul and the human mind are beyond caste. For it had seen in the lowest human being the Godhead, Narayan. It emphasised distinctions only to turn upon them and deny all distinctions. If all its



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

political needs and circumstances compelled it at last to exaggerate the monarchical principle and declare the divinity of the king and to abolish its earlier republican city-state and independent federations as too favourable to the centrifugal tendency, if therefore it could not develop democracy, yet it had the democratic idea, applied it in the village, in council and municipality, within the caste, was the first to assert a divinity in the people and could cry to the monarch at the height of his power, "O king, what art thou but the head servant of the demos?" Its idea of the golden age was a free spiritual anarchism. Its spiritual extremism could not prevent it from fathoming through a long era the life of the senses and its enjoyments, and there too it sought the utmost richness of sensuous detail and the depths and intensities of sensuous experience. Yet it is notable that this pursuit of the most opposite extremes never resulted in disorder; and its most

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

heronistic period offers nothing that at all resembles the unbridled corruption which a similar tendency has more than once produced in Europe. For the Indian mind is not only spiritual and ethical, but intellectual and artistic, and both the rule of the intellect and the rhythm of beauty are hostile to the spirit of chaos. In every extreme the Indian spirit seeks for a law in that extreme and a rule, measure and structure in its application. Besides, this sounding of extremes is balanced by a still more ingrained characteristic, the synthetical tendency, so that having pushed each motive to its farthest possibility the Indian mind returns always towards some fusion of the knowledge it has gained and to a resulting harmony and balance in action and institution. Balance and rhythm which the Greeks arrived at by self-limitation, India arrived at by its sense of intellectual, ethical and aesthetic order and the synthetic impulse of its mind and life.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

I have dwelt on these facts because they are apt to be ignored by those who look only at certain sides of the Indian mind and spirit which are most prominent in the last epochs. By insisting only upon these we get an inaccurate or incomplete idea of the past of India and of the integral meaning of its civilisation and the spirit that animated it. The present is only a last deposit of the past at a time of ebb ; it has no doubt also to be the starting-point of the future, but in this present all that was in India's past is still dormant, it is not destroyed ; it is waiting there to assume new forms. The decline was the ebb-movement of a creative spirit which can only be understood by seeing it in the full tide of its greatness ; the renascence is the return of the tide and it is the same spirit that is likely to animate it, although the forms it takes may be quite new. To judge therefore the possibilities of the renascence, the powers that it may reveal and the scope

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

that it may take, we must dismiss the idea that the tendency of metaphysical abstraction is the one note of the Indian spirit which dominates or inspires all its cadences. Its real key-note is the tendency of spiritual realisation, not cast at all into any white monotone, but many-faceted, many-coloured, as supple in its adaptability as it is intense in its highest pitches. The note of spirituality is dominant, initial, constant, always recurrent; it is the support of all the rest. The first age of India's greatness was a spiritual age when she sought passionately for the truth of existence through an intuitive mind and through an inner experience and interpretation both of the psychic and the physical existence. The stamp put on her by that beginning she has never lost, but rather always enriched it with fresh spiritual experience and discovery at each step of the national life. Even in her hour of decline it was the one thing she could never lose.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

But this spiritual tendency does not shoot upward only to the abstract, the hidden and the intangible ; it casts its rays downward and outward to embrace the multiplicities of thought and the richness of life. Therefore the second long epoch of India's greatness was an age of the intellect, the ethical sense, the dynamic will in action enlightened to formulate and govern life in the lustre of spiritual truth. After the age of the Spirit, the age of the Dharma ; after the Veda and Upanishads, the heroic centuries of action and social formation, typical construction and thought and philosophy, when the outward forms of Indian life and culture were fixed in their large lines and even their later developments were being determined in the seed. The great classical age of Sanskrit culture was the flowering of this intellectuality into curiosity of detail in the refinements of scholarship, science, art, literature, politics, sociology, mundane life. We see

## III. RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

at this time too the sounding not only of aesthetic, but of emotional and sensuous, even of vital and sensual experience. But the old spirituality reigned behind all this mental and all this vital activity, and its later period, the post-classical, saw a lifting up of the whole lower life and an impressing upon it of the values of the spirit. This was the sense of the Puranic and Tantric systems and the religions of Bhakti. Later Vaishnavism, the last fine flower of the Indian spirit, was in its essence the taking up of the aesthetic, emotional and sensuous being into the service of the spiritual. It completed the curve of the cycle.

The evening of decline which followed the completion of the curve was prepared by three movements of retrogression. First there is, comparatively, a sinking of that superabundant vital energy and a fading of the joy of life and the joy of creation. Even in the decline this energy is still something splendid and extraordinary and

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

only for a very brief period sinks nearest to a complete torpor ; but still a comparison with its past greatness will show that the decadence was marked and progressive. Secondly, there is a rapid cessation of the old free intellectual activity, a slumber of the scientific and the critical mind as well as the creative intuition ; what remains becomes more and more a repetition of ill-understood fragments of past knowledge. There is a petrification of the mind and life in the relics of the forms which a great intellectual past had created. Old authority and rule become rigidly despotic and, as always then happens, lose their real sense and spirit. Finally, spirituality remains but burns no longer with the large and clear flame of knowledge of former times, but in intense jets and in a dispersed action which replaces the old magnificent synthesis and in which certain spiritual truths are emphasised to the neglect of others. This diminution amounts to a certain failure of

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

the great endeavour which is the whole meaning of Indian culture, a falling short in the progress towards the perfect spiritualisation of the mind and the life. The beginnings were superlative, the developments very great, but at a certain point where progress, adaptation, a new flowering should have come in, the old civilisation stopped short, partly drew back, partly lost its way. The essential no doubt remained and still remains in the heart of the race and not only in its habits and memories, but in its action it was covered up in a great smoke of confusion. The causes internal and external we need not now discuss ; but the fact is there. It was the cause of the momentary helplessness of the Indian mind in the face of new and unprecedented conditions.

It was at this moment that the European wave swept over India. The first effect of this entry of a new and quite opposite civilisation was the destruction of much that had no longer the power to



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

live, the deliquescence of much else, a tendency to the devitalisation of the rest. A new activity came in, but this was at first crudely and confusedly imitative of the foreign culture. It was a crucial moment and an ordeal of perilous severity ; a less vigorous energy of life might well have foundered and perished under the double weight of the deadening of its old innate motives and a servile imitation of alien ideas and habits. History shows us how disastrous this situation can be to nations and civilisations. But fortunately the energy of life was there, sleeping only for a moment, not dead, and, given that energy, the evil carried within itself its own cure. For whatever temporary rotting and destruction this crude impact of European life and culture has caused, it gave three needed impulses. It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse ; it re-habilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation ; it put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating and conquering them. The national mind turned a new eye on its past culture, re-awoke to its sense and import, but also at the same time saw it in relation to modern knowledge and ideas. Out of this awakening vision and impulse the Indian renaissance is arising, and that must determine its future tendency. The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work ; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second ; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult. Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity.

The Spirit is a higher infinite of

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

verities ; life is a lower infinite of possibilities which seek to grow and find their own truth and fulfilment in the light of these verities. Our intellect, our will, our ethical and our aesthetic being are the reflectors and the mediators. The method of the West is to exaggerate life and to call down as much—or as little—as may be of the higher powers to stimulate and embellish life.\* But the method of India is on the contrary to discover the spirit within and the higher hidden intensities of the superior powers and to dominate life in one way or another so as to make it responsive to and expressive of the spirit and in that way increase the power of life. Its tendency with the intellect, will, ethical, aesthetic and emotional being is to sound indeed their normal mental possibilities, but also to upraise them towards the greater light and power of their own highest intuitions. The

\* Mr. Cousin's distinction between invocation and evocation.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

work of the renaissance in India must be to make this spirit, this higher view of life, this sense of our potentiality once more a reality, to place a dominant power in the world. But to that truth of itself India is as yet only vaguely awake. The mass of Indian action is still in the main proceeding under the impulse of the European motive and method and, because there is a spirit within us to which they are foreign, the action is poor in will, feeble in form and ineffective in results. For it does not come from the roots of our being. Only in a few directions is there some clear light of self-knowledge. It is when a greater light prevails and becomes general that we shall be able to speak, not only in prospect but in fact, of the renaissance of India.

## II

THE process which has led up to the renaissance now inevitable, may be analysed, both historically and logically, into three steps by which a transition is being managed, a complex breaking, reshaping and new building, with the final result yet distant in prospect,—though here and there the first bases may have been already laid,—a new age of an old culture transformed, not an affiliation of a newborn civilisation to one that is old and dead, but a true rebirth, a renascence. The first step was the reception of the European contact, a radical reconsideration of many of the prominent elements and some revolutionary denial of the very principles of the old culture. The second was a reaction of the Indian spirit upon the European influence, sometimes with a total denial of what it offered

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

and a stressing both of the essential and the strict letter of the national past, which, yet masked a movement of assimilation. The third, only now beginning or recently begun, is rather a process of new creation in which the spiritual power of the Indian mind remains supreme, recovers its truths, accepts whatever it finds sound or true, useful or inevitable of the modern idea and form, but so transmutes and indianises it, so absorbs and so transforms it entirely into itself that its foreign character disappears and it becomes another harmonious element in the characteristic working of the ancient goddess, the Shakti of India mastering and taking possession of the modern influence, no longer possessed or overcome by it.

Nothing in the many processes of Nature whether she deals with men or with things, comes by chance or accident or is really at the mercy of external causes. What things are inwardly, determines the course of even

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

their most considerable changes; and timeless India being what she is, the complexity of this transition was predestined and unavoidable. It was impossible that she should take a rapid wholesale imprint of western motives and their forms and leave the ruling motives of her own past to accommodate themselves to the foreign change as best they could afterwards. A swift transformation scene like that which brought into being a new modernised Japan, would have been out of the question for her, even if the external circumstances had been equally favourable. For Japan lives centrally in her temperament and in her aesthetic sense, and therefore she has always been rapidly assimilative; her strong temperamental persistence has been enough to preserve her national stamp and her artistic vision a sufficient power to keep her soul alive. But India lives centrally in the spirit, with less buoyancy and vivacity and therefore with a less ready adaptive-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

ness of creation, but a greater, intense, more brooding depth, her processes are apt to be deliberate, uncertain and long, because she has to take things into that depth and from its profound inwardness to modify or remould the more outward parts of her life. And until this has been done, the absorption completed, the powers of the remoulding determined, she cannot yet move forward with an easier step on the new way she is taking. From the complexity of the movement arises all the difficulty of the problems she has to face and the rather chaotic confusion of the opinions, standpoints and tendencies that have got entangled in the process, which prevents any easy, clear and decided development, so that we seem to be advancing under a confused pressure of circumstance or in a series of shifting waves of impulsion, this ebbing for that to arise, rather than with any clear idea of our future direction. But here too lies the assurance that once the



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

inner direction has found its way and its implications have come to the surface, the result will be no mere Asiatic modification of western modernism, but some great, new and original thing of the first importance to the future of human civilisation.

This was not the idea of the earliest generation of intellectuals, few in number but powerful by their talent and origina-tive vigour that arose as the first result of western education in India. Theirs was the impatient hope of a transformation such as took place afterwards with so striking a velocity in Japan ; they saw in welcome prospect a new India modernised wholesale and radically in mind, spirit and life. Intensely patriotic in motive, they were yet denationalised in their mental attitude. They admitted practically, if not in set opinion, the occidental view of our past culture as only a half-civilisation and their governing ideals were borrowed from the west or at least centrally inspired by the purely

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

western spirit and type of their education. From medieval India they drew away in revolt and inclined to discredit and destroy whatever it had created; if they took anything from it, it was as poetic symbols to which they gave a superficial and modern significance. To ancient India they looked back on the contrary with a sentiment of pride, at least in certain directions, and were willing to take from it whatever material they could subdue to their new standpoint, but they could not quite grasp anything of it in its original sense and spirit and strove to rid it of all that would not square with their westernised intellectuality. They sought for a bare, simplified and rationalised religion, created a literature which imported very eagerly the forms, ideas and whole spirit of their English models,—the value of the other arts was almost entirely ignored,—put their political faith and hope in a wholesale assimilation or rather an exact imitation of the

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

middle-class pseudo-democracy of nineteenth-century England, would have revolutionised Indian society by introducing into it all the social ideas and main features of the European form. Whatever value for the future there may be in the things they grasped at with this eager conviction, their method was, as we now recognise, a false method,—an anglicised India is a thing we can no longer view as either possible or desirable,—and it could only, if pursued to the end, have made us painful copyists, clumsy followers always stumbling in the wake of European evolution and always fifty years behind it. This movement of thought did not and could not endure ; something of it still continues, but its engrossing power has passed away beyond any chance of vigorous revival.

Nevertheless, this earliest period of crude reception left behind it results that were of value and indeed indispensable to a powerful renaissance. We may single

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

out three of them as of the first order of importance. It reawakened a free activity of the intellect which, though at first confined within very narrow bounds and derivative in its ideas, is now spreading to all subjects of human and natural interest and is supplying itself with an increasing curiosity and a growing originality to every field it seizes. This is bringing back to the Indian mind its old unquenching thirst for all kinds of knowledge and must restore to it before long the width of its range and the depth and flexible power of its action; and it has opened to it the full scope of the critical faculty of the human mind, its passion for exhaustive observation and emancipated judgment which, in older times exercised only by a few and within limits, has now become an essential equipment of the intellect. These things the imitative period did not itself carry very far, but it cast the germ which we now see beginning to fructify more richly. Second-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

It threw definitely the ferment of modern ideas into the old culture and fixed them before our view in such a way that we are obliged to reckon and deal with them in far other sort than would have been possible if we had simply proceeded from our old fixed traditions without some such momentary violent break in our customary view of things. Finally, it made us turn our look upon all that our past contains with new eyes which have not only enabled us to recover something of their ancient sense and spirit, long embedded and lost in the unintelligent practice of received forms, but to bring out of them a new light which gives to the old truths fresh aspects and therefore novel potentialities of creation and evolution. That in this first period we misunderstood our ancient culture, does not matter ; the enforcement of a reconsideration, which even orthodox thought has been obliged to accept, is the fact of capital importance.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

The second period of reaction of the Indian mind upon the new elements, its movement towards a recovery of the national poise, has helped us to direct these powers and tendencies into sounder and much more fruitful lines of action. For the anglicising impulse was very soon met by the old national spirit and began to be heavily suffused by its influence. It is now a very small and always dwindling number of our present-day intellectuals who still remain obstinately westernised in their outlook; and even these have given up the attitude of blatant and uncompromising depreciation of the past which was at one time a common poise. A larger number have proceeded by a constantly increasing suffusion of their modernism with much of ancient motive and sentiment, a better insight into the meaning of Indian things and their characteristics, a free acceptance more of their spirit than of their forms and an attempt at new interpretation. At

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

first the central idea still remained very plainly of the modern type and betrayed everywhere the western inspiration, but it drew to itself willingly the ancient ideas and it coloured itself more and more with their essential spirit ; and latterly this suffusing element has overflowed, has tended more and more to take up and subdue the original motives until the thought and spirit, turn and tinge are now characteristically Indian. The work of Bunkim Chandra Chatterji and Tagore, the two minds of the most distinctive and original genius in our recent literature illustrate the stages of this transition.

Side by side with this movement and more characteristic and powerful there has been flowing an opposite current. This first started on its way by an integral reaction, a vindication and reacceptance of everything Indian as it stood and because it was Indian. We have still waves of this impulse and many of its influences continuing among us ; for its

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

work is not yet completed. But in reality the reaction marks the beginning of a more subtle assimilation and fusing: for in vindicating such a thing, it has been obliged to do so in a way that will at once meet and satisfy the old man, the old and the new, the traditional and the critical mind. This in itself involves no mere return, but consciously or unconsciously hastens a restatement. And the riper form of the return has taken as its principle a synthetical restatement: it has sought to arrive at the spirit of the ancient culture and, while respecting its forms and often preserving them to revivify, has yet not hesitated also to remould, to reject the outworn and to admit whatever new motive seemed assimilable to the old spirituality or apt to widen the channel of its larger evolution. Of this freer dealing with past and present, this preservation by reconstruction Vivekananda was in his life-time the leading exemplar and the most powerful exponent. /



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

But this too could not be the end ; of itself it leads towards a principle of new creation. Otherwise the upshot of the double current of thought and tendency might be an incongruous assimilation, something in the mental sphere like the strangely assorted half European, half Indian dress which we now put upon our bodies. India has to get back entirely to the native power of her spirit at its very deepest and to turn all the needed strengths and aims of her present and future life into materials for that spirit to work upon and integrate and harmonise. Of such vital and original creation we may cite the new Indian art as a striking example. The beginning of this process of original creation in every sphere of her national activity will be the sign of the integral self-finding of her renaissance.

### III

**T**O attempt to penetrate through the indeterminate confusion of present tendencies and first efforts in order to foresee the exact forms the new creation will take, would be an effort of very doubtful utility. One might as well try to forecast a harmony from the sounds made by the tuning of the instrument. In one direction or another we may just detect certain decisive indications, but even these are only first indications and we may be quite sure that much lies behind them that will go far beyond anything that they yet suggest. This is true whether in religion and spirituality or thought and science, poetry and art or society and politics. Everywhere there is, at most, only a beginning of beginnings.

One thing seems at any rate certain, that the spiritual motive will be in the future of

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

India, as in her past, the real originative and dominating strain. By spirituality we do not mean a remote metaphysical mind or the tendency to dream rather than to act. That was not the great India of old in her splendid days of vigour,—whatever certain European critics or interpreters of her culture may say,—and it will not be the India of the future. Metaphysical thinking will always no doubt be a strong element in her mentality, and it is to be hoped that she will never lose her great, her sovereign powers in that direction; but Indian metaphysics are as far removed from the brilliant or the profound idea-spinning of the French or the German mind as from the broad intellectual generalising on the basis of the facts of physical science which for some time did duty for philosophy in modern Europe. It has always been in its essential parts an intellectual approach to spiritual realisation. Though in later times it led too much away from

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

life, yet that was not its original character whether in its early vedantic intuitional forms or in those later developments of it, such as the Gita, which belong to the period of its most vigorous intellectual originality and creation. Buddhism itself, the philosophy which first really threw doubt on the value of life, did so only in its intellectual tendency ; in its dynamic parts, by its ethical system and spiritual method, it gave a new set of values, a severe vigour, yet a gentler idealism to human living and was therefore powerfully creative both in the arts which interpret life and in society and politics. To realise intimately truth of spirit and to quicken and to remould life by it is the native tendency of the Indian mind, and to that it must always return in all its periods of health, greatness and vigour.

All great movements of life in India have begun with a new spiritual thought and usually a new religious

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

activity. What more striking and significant fact can there be than this that even the new European influence, which was an influence intellectual, rationalistic, so often antireligious and which drew so much of its idealism from the increasingly cosmopolitan, mundane and secularist thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, precipitated in India from the very first an attempt at religious reformation and led actually to the creation of new religions ? The instinct of the Indian mind was that, if a reconstruction of ideas and of society was to be attempted, it must start from a spiritual basis and take from the first a religious motive and form. The Brahmo Samaj had in its inception a large cosmopolitan idea, it was even almost eclectic in the choice of the materials for the synthesis it attempted ; it combined a Vedantic first inspiration, outward forms akin to those of English Unitarianism and something of its temper, a modicum of its temper, a modicum of Christian influ-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

ence, a strong dose of religious rationalism and intellectualism. It is noteworthy, however, that it started from an endeavour to restate the Vedanta, and it is curiously significant of the way in which even what might be well called a protestant movement follows the curve of the national tradition and temper, that the three stages of its growth, marked by the three churches or congregations into which it split, correspond to the three eternal motives of the Indian religious mind, Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, the contemplative and philosophical, the emotional and fervently devotional and the actively and practically dynamic spiritual mentality. The Arya Samaj in the Punjab founded itself on a fresh interpretation of the truth of the Veda and an attempt to apply old Vedic principles of life to modern conditions. The movement associated with the great names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda has been a very wide synthesis of past religious motives and spiritual ex-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

perience topped by a reaffirmation of the old asceticism and monasticism, but with new living strands in it and combined with a strong humanitarianism and zeal of missionary expansion. There has been too the movement of orthodox Hindu revivalism, more vigorous two or three decades ago than it is now. The rest of India has either felt vibrations of some of these great regional movements or been touched with smaller ones of their own making. In Bengal a strong Neo-Vaishnavic tendency is the most recent development of its religious mind and shows that the preparatory creative activity has not yet finished its workings. Throughout India the old religious sects and disciplines are becoming strongly revitalised, vocal, active, moved to a fresh self-affirmation. Islam has recently shared in the general stirring and attempts to return vitally to the original Islamic ideals or to strike out fresh developments have preceded or accompanied the awakening to life of

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

the long torpid Musalman mass in India.

Perhaps none of these forms, nor all the sum of them be definitive, they may constitute only the preparatory self-finding of the Indian spiritual mind recovering its past and turning towards its future. India is the meeting-place of the religions and among these Hinduism alone is by itself a vast and complex thing, not so much a religion as a great diversified and yet subtly unified mass of spiritual thought, realisation and aspiration. What will finally come out of all this stir and ferment, lies yet in the future. There has been an introduction of fresh fruitful impulses to activity: there has been much revival of the vitality of old forms, a new study, rehabilitation, resort to old disciplines and old authorities and scriptures,—we may note that Vedanta, Veda, Purana, Yoga, and recently the same thing is being initiated with regard to the Tantra, have each in their turn



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

been brought back into understanding, if not always yet to a perfect understanding, to practice, to some efficacy on thought and on life ; there has been an evolution of enlarging truth and novel forms out of ancient ideas and renewed experience. Whatever the last upshot may be, this spiritual and religious ferment and activity stand out as the most prominent feature of the new India : and it may be observed that while in other fields the tendency has been, until quite recently, more critical than constructive, here every impulse has been throughout powerfully creative. Especially, we see everywhere the tendency towards the return of the spirit upon life ; the reassertion of a spiritual living as a foundation for a new life of the nation has been a recognizable impulse. Even asceticism and monasticism are rapidly becoming, no longer merely contemplative, selfcentred or aloof, but missionary, educative, humanitarian. And recently in the utterances

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

of the leaders of thought the insistence on life has been growing marked, self-conscious and positive. This is at present the most significant immediate sign of the future. Probably, here lies the key of the Indian renaissance, in a return from forms to the depths of a released spirituality which will show itself again in a pervading return of spirituality upon life.

But what are likely to be the great constructive ideas and the great decisive instruments which this spirituality will take to deal with and govern life, is as yet obscure, because the thought of this new India is still inchoate and indeterminate. Religions, creeds and forms are only a characteristic outward sign of the spiritual impulsion and religion itself is the intensive action by which it tries to find its inward force. Its expansive movement comes in the thought which it throws out on life, the ideals which open up new horizons and which the intellect

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

accepts and life labours to assimilate. Philosophy in India has been the intellectual canaliser of spiritual knowledge and experience, but the philosophical intellect has not as yet decidedly begun the work of new creation ; it has been rather busy with the restatement of its past gains than with any new statement which would visibly and rapidly enlarge the boundaries of its thought and aspiration. The contact of European philosophy has not been fruitful of any creative reaction ; first because the past philosophies of Europe have very little that could be of any utility in this direction, nothing of the first importance in fact which India has not already stated in forms better suited to her own spiritual temper and genius, and though the thought of Nietzsche, of Bergson and of James has recently touched more vitally just a few minds here and there, their drift is much too externally pragmatic and vitalistic to be genuinely assim-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

lable by the Indian spirit. But, principally, a real Indian philosophy can only be evolved out of spiritual experience and as the fruit of the spiritual seeking which all the religious movements of the past century have helped to generalise. It cannot spring, as in Europe, out of the critical intellect solely or as the fruit of scientific thought and knowledge. Nor has there been very much preparing force of original critical thought in nineteenth century India. The more original intellects have either turned towards pure literature or else been busy assimilating and at most indianising modern ideas. And though a stronger thought tendency is now beginning, all is yet uncertain flux or brilliantly vague foreshadowing.

In poetry, literature, art, science there have, on the contrary, been definite beginnings. Bengal in these, as in many other directions, has been recently the chief testing crucible or the first workshop of the Shakti of India ; it is there she has chosen

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

to cast in the greatest vivacity of new influences and develop her initial forms and inspirations. In the rest of India there is often much activity of production and one hears here and there of a solitary poet or prose-writer of genius or notable talent ; but Bengal has already a considerable literature of importance, with a distinct spirit and form, well-based and always developing ; she has now a great body of art original, inspired, full of delicate beauty and vision ; she has not only two renowned scientists, one of the two world-famous for a central and far-reaching discovery, but a young school of research which promises to count for something in the world's science. It is here therefore that we can observe the trend of the Indian mind and the direction in which it is turning. Especially the art of the Bengal painters is very significant, more so even than the prose of Bunkim or the poetry of Tagore. Bengali poetry has had to feel its way and does not seem yet

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

quite definitively to have found it, but Bengal art has found its way at once at the first step, by a sort of immediate intuition.

Partly, this is because the new literature began in the period of foreign influence and of an indecisive groping, while art in India was quite silent,—except for the preposterous Ravi Varma interlude which was doomed to sterility by its absurdly barren incompetence,—began in a moment of self-recovery and could profit by a clearer possibility of light. But besides, plastic art is in itself by its very limitation, by the narrower and intense range of its forms and motives, often more decisively indicative than the more fluid and variable turns of literary thought and expression. Now the whole power of the Bengal artists springs from their deliberate choice of the spirit and hidden meaning in things rather than their form and surface meaning as the object to be expressed. It is intuitive

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

and its forms are the very rhythm of its intuition, they have little to do with the metric formalities devised by the observing intellect ; it leans over the finite to discover its suggestions of the infinite and inexpressible ; it turns to outward life and nature to found upon it lines and colours, rhythms and embodiments which will be significant of the other life and other nature than the physical which all that is merely outward conceals. This is the eternal motive of Indian art, but applied in a new way less largely ideaed, mythological and symbolical, but with a more delicately suggestive attempt at a near, subtle, direct embodiment. This art is a true new creation, and we may expect that the artistic mind of the rest of India will follow through the gate thus opened, but we may expect it too to take on there other characteristics and find other ways of expression ; for the peculiar turn and tone given by the Calcutta painters is intimate to the temperament of Bengal. But

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

India is great by the unity of her national coupled with the rich diversity of her regional mind. That we may expect to see reflected in the resurgence of her artistic creativeness.

Poetry and literature in Bengal have gone through two distinct stages and seem to be preparing for a third of which one cannot quite foresee the character. It began with a European and mostly an English influence, a taking in of fresh poetical and prose forms, literary ideas, artistic canons. It was a period of copious and buoyant creation which produced a number of poets and poetesses, one or two of great genius, others of a fine poetic capacity, much work of beauty and distinction, a real opening of the flood-gates of Saraswati. Its work was not at all crudely imitative; the foreign influences are everywhere visible; but they are assimilated, not merely obeyed or aped. The quality of the Bengali temperament and its native aesthetic turn took



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

gold of them and poured them into a mould of speech suitable to its own spirit. But still the substance was not quite native to the soul and therefore one feels a certain void in it. The form and expression have the peculiar grace and the delicate plastic beauty which Bengali poetical expression achieved from its beginning, but the thing expressed does not in the end amount to very much. As is inevitable when one does not think or create freely but is principally assimilating thought and form, it is thin and falls short of the greatness which we would expect from the natural power of the poet.

That period is long over, it has lived its time and its work has taken its place in the past of the literature. Two of its creators, one, the sovereign initiator of its prose expression, supreme by combination of original mentality with a flawless artistic gift, the other born into its last glow of productive brilliance, but out-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

living it to develop another strain and a profounder voice of poetry, released the real soul of Bengal into expression. The work of Bunkim Chandra is now of the past, because it has entered already into the new mind of Bengal which it did more than any other literary influence to form. The work of Rabindranath still largely holds the present, but it has opened ways for the future which promise to go beyond it. Both show an increasing return to the Indian spirit in fresh forms; both are voices of the dawn, seek more than they find, suggest and are calling for more than they actually evoke. At present we see a fresh preparation, on one side evolving and promising to broaden out from the influence of Tagore, on the other in revolt against it and insisting on a more distinctively national type of inspiration and creation; but what will come out of it, is not yet clear. On the whole it appears that the movement is turning in the same direction as that of the new art, though

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

with the more flexible utterance and varied motive natural to the spoken thought and expressive word. No utterance of the highest genius, such as would give the decisive turn, has yet made itself heard. But some faint promise of a great imaginative and intuitive literature of a new Indian type is already discernible in these uncertain voices.

In the things of the mind we have then within however limited an area certain beginnings, preparatory or even initially definitive. But in the outward life of the nation we are still in a stage of much uncertainty and confusion. Very largely this is due to the political conditions which have ceased in spirit to be those of the past, but are not yet in fact those of the future. The fever and the strain born from the alternation of waves of aspiration with the reflux of non-fulfilment are not favourable to the strong formulation of a new birth in the national life. All that is as yet clear is, that the first period of a

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

superficial assimilation and aping of European political ideas and methods is over. Another political spirit has awakened in the people under the shock of the movement of the last decade which, vehemently national in its motive proclaimed a religion of Indian patriotism, applied the notions of the ancient religion and philosophy to politics, expressed the cult of the country as mother and Shakti and attempted to base the idea of democracy firmly on the spiritual thought and impulses native to the Indian mind. Crude often and uncertain in its self-expression, organising its effort for revolt against past and present conditions but not immediately successful in carrying forward its methods of constructive development, it still effectively aroused the people and gave a definite turn to its political thought and life, the outcome of which can only appear when the nation has found completely the will and gained sufficiently the power to determine its own evolution.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

Indian society is in a still more chaotic stage ; for the old forms are crumbling away under the pressure of the environment, their spirit and reality are more and more passing out of them, but the facade persists by the force of inertia of thought and will and the remaining attachment of a long association, while the new is still powerless to be born. There is much of slow and often hardly perceptible destruction, a dull preservation effective only by immobility, no possibility yet of sound reconstruction. We have had a loud proclaiming,—only where supported by religion, as in the reforming Somajes, any strong effectuation,—of a movement of social change, appealing sometimes cruelly to Western exemplars and ideals, sometimes to the genius or the pattern of ancient times ; but it has quite failed to carry the people, because it could not get at their spirit and itself lacked, with the exceptions noted, in robust sincerity. We have had too a revival of orthodox conser-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

vatism, more academic and sentimental than profound in its impulse or in touch with the great facts and forces of life. We have now in emergence an increasing sense of the necessity of a renovation of social ideas and expressive forms by the spirit of the nation awaking to the deeper yet unexpressed implications of its own culture, but as yet no sufficient will or means of execution. It is probable that only with the beginning of a freer national life will the powers of the renaissance take effective hold of the social mind and action of the awakened people.

#### IV

THE renaissance thus determining itself, but not yet finally determined, if it is to be what the name implies, a rebirth of the soul of India into a new body of energy, a new form of its innate and ancient spirit, *prajna purani*, must insist much more finally and integrally than it has as yet done on its spiritual turn, on the greater and greater action of the spiritual motive in every sphere of our living. But here we are still liable to be met by the remnants of a misunderstanding or a refusal to understand,—it is something of both,—which was perhaps to a little extent justified by certain ascetic or religionist exaggerations, a distrust which is accentuated by a recoil from the excessive other-worldliness that has marked certain developments of the Indian mind and life, but yet is not justified, because it misses the true point at

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

issue. Thus we are sometimes asked what on earth we mean by spirituality in art and poetry or in political and social life.—a confession of ignorance—strange enough in any Indian mouth at this stage of our national history,—or how art and poetry will be any the better when they have put into them what I have recently seen described as the “twang of spirituality.” And how the practical problems either of society or of politics are going at all to profit by this element. We have here really an echo of the European idea, now of sufficiently long standing, that religion and spirituality on the one side and intellectual activity and practical life on the other are two entirely different things and have each to be pursued on its own entirely separate lines and in obedience to its own entirely separate principles. Again we may be met also by the suspicion that in holding up this ideal rule before India we are pointing her to the metaphysical and away from the dynamic and pragma-



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

tic or inculcating some obscurantist reactionary principle of mystical or irrational religiosity and diverting her from the paths of reason and modernity which she must follow if she is to be an efficient and a well-organised nation able to survive in the shocks of the modern world. We must therefore try to make clear what it is we mean by a renaissance governed by the principle of spirituality.

But first let us say what we do not mean by this ideal. Clearly it does not signify that we shall regard earthly life as a temporal vanity, try to become all of us as soon as possible monastic ascetics, frame our social life into a preparation for the monastery or cavern or mountain-top or make of it a static life without any great progressive ideals but only some aim which has nothing to do with earth or the collective advance of the human race. That may have been for some time a tendency of the Indian mind, but it was never the whole tendency. Nor does spirituality

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

mean the moulding of the whole type of the national being to suit the limited dogmas, forms, tenets of a particular religion, as was often enough attempted by the old societies, an idea which still persists in many minds by the power of old mental habit and association; clearly such an attempt would be impossible, even if it were desirable, in a country full of the most diverse religious opinions and harbouring too three such distinct general forms as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, to say nothing of the numerous special forms to which each of these has given birth. Spirituality is much wider than any particular religion, and in the larger ideas of it that are now coming on us even the greatest religion becomes no more than a broad sect or branch of the one universal religion, by which we shall understand in the future man's seeking for the eternal, the divine, the greater self, the source of unity and his attempt to arrive at some equation, some increasing

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

approximation of the values of human life with the eternal and the divine values.

Nor do we mean the exclusion of anything whatsoever from our scope, of any of the great aims of human life, any of the great problems of our modern world, any form of human activity, any general or inherent impulse or characteristic means of the desire of the soul of man for development, expansion, increasing vigour and joy, light, power, perfection. Spirit without mind, spirit without body is not the type of man, therefore a human spirituality must not belittle the mind, life or body or hold them of small account : it will rather hold them of high account, of immense importance, precisely because they are the conditions and instruments of the life of the spirit in man. The ancient Indian culture attached quite as much value to the soundness, growth and strength of the mind, life and body as the old Hellenic or the modern scientific thought, although for a different end and a greater motive.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

Therefore to everything that serves and belongs to the healthy fullness of these things, it gave free play, to the activity of the reason, to science and philosophy, to the satisfaction of the aesthetic being and to all the many arts great or small, to the health and strength of the body, to the physical and economical wellbeing, ease, opulence of the race,—there was never a national ideal of poverty in India as some would have us believe, nor was bareness or squalor the essential setting of her spirituality,—and to its general military, political and social strength and efficiency. Their aim was high, but firm and wide too was the base they sought to establish and great the care bestowed on these first instruments. Necessarily the new India will seek the same end in new ways under the vivid impulse of fresh and large ideas and by an instrumentality suited to more complex conditions ; but the scope of her effort and action and the suppleness and variety of her mind will

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

not be less, but greater than of old. Spirituality is not necessarily exclusive ; it can be and in its fullness must be all-inclusive.

But still there is a great difference between the spiritual and the purely material and mental view of existence. The spiritual view holds that the mind, life, body are man's means and not his aims and even that they are not his last and highest means ; it sees them as his outer instrumental self and not his whole being. It sees the infinite behind all things finite and it adjudges the value of the finite by higher infinite values of which they are the imperfect translation and towards which, to a truer expression of them, they are always trying to arrive. It sees a greater reality than the apparent not only behind man and the world, but within man and the world, and this soul, self, divine thing in man it holds to be that in him which is of the highest importance, that which everything else in him must try in whatever way to bring out and

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

express, and this soul, self, divine presence in the world it holds to be that which man has ever to try to see and recognise through all appearances, to unite his thought and life with it and in it to find his unity with his fellows. This alters necessarily our whole normal view of things ; even in preserving all the aims of human life, it will give them a different sense and direction.

We aim at the health and vigour of the body ; but with what object ? For its own sake, will be the ordinary reply, because it is worth having ; or else that we may have long life and sound basis for our intellectual, vital, emotional satisfactions. Yes, for its own sake, in a way, but in this sense that the physical too is an expression of the spirit and its perfection is worth having, is part of the dharma of the complete human living ; but still more as a basis for all that higher activity which ends in the discovery and expression of the divine self in man, *Cari-*

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

*ram khalu dharma-sadhanam*, runs the old Sanskrit saying, the body too is our means for fulfilling the dharma, the Godward law of our being. The mental, the emotional, the aesthetic parts of us have to be developed, is the ordinary view, so that they may have a greater satisfaction or because that is man's finer nature, because so he feels himself more alive and fulfilled. This, but not this only ; rather because these things too are the expressions of the spirit, things which are seeking in him for their divine values and by their growth, subtlety, flexibility, power, intensity he is able to come nearer to the divine Reality in the world, to lay hold on it variously, to tune eventually his whole life into unity and conformity with it. Morality is in the ordinary view a well-regulated individual and social conduct which keeps society going and leads towards a better, a more rational, temperate, sympathetic, self-restrained dealing with our fellows. But ethics in the spiri-

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

tual point of view is much more, it is a means of developing in our action and still more essentially in the character of our being the diviner self in us, a step of our growing into the nature of the Godhead.

So with all our aims and activities, spirituality takes them all and gives them a greater, diviner, more intimate sense. Philosophy is in the western way of dealing with it a dispassionate enquiry by the light of the reason into the first truths of existence, which we shall get at either by observing the facts science places at our disposal or by a careful dialectical scrutiny of the concepts of the reason or a mixture of the two methods. But from the spiritual view-point truth of existence is to be found by intuition and inner experience and not only by the reason and by scientific observation ; the work of philosophy is to arrange the data given by the various means of knowledge, excluding none, and put them into their synthetic relation to the one truth, the one supreme and universal



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

reality. Eventually, its real value is to prepare a basis for spiritual realisation and the growing of the human being into his divine self and divine nature. Science itself becomes only a knowledge of the world which throws an added light on the spirit of the universe and his way in things. Nor will it confine itself to a physical knowledge and its practical fruits or to the knowledge of life and man and mind based upon the idea of matter or material energy as our starting-point; a spiritualised culture will make room for new fields of research, for new and old psychical sciences and results which start from spirit as the first truth and from the power of mind and of what is greater than mind to act upon life and matter. The primitive aim of art and poetry is to create images of man and Nature which shall satisfy the sense of beauty and embody artistically the ideas of the intelligence about life and the responses of the imagination to it; but in a spiritual culture

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

they become too in their aim a revelation of greater things concealed in man and Nature and of the deepest spiritual and universal beauty. Politics, society, economy are in the first form of human life simply an arrangement by which men collectively can live, produce, satisfy their desires, enjoy, progress in bodily, vital and mental efficiency; but the spiritual aim makes them much more than this, first, a framework of life within which man can seek for and grow into his real self and divinity, secondly, an increasing embodiment of the divine law of being in life, thirdly, a collective advance towards the light, power, peace, unity, harmony of the diviner nature of humanity which the race is trying to evolve. This and nothing more but nothing less, this in all its potentialities, is what we mean by a spiritual culture and the application of spirituality to life.

Those who distrust this ideal or who cannot understand it, are still under the

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

sway of the European conception of life which for a time threatened to swamp entirely the Indian spirit. But let us remember that Europe itself is labouring to outgrow the limitations of its own conceptions and precisely by a rapid infusion of the ideas of the East,—naturally, essential ideas and not the mere forms,—which have been first infiltrating and are now more freely streaming into Western thought, poetry, art, ideas of life, not to overturn its culture, but to transform, enlighten and aggrandise its best values and to add new elements which have too long been ignored or forgotten. It will be singular if while Europe is thus intelligently enlarging herself in the new light she has been able to seize and admitting the truths of the spirit and the aim at a divine change in man and his life, we in India are to take up the cast-off clothes of European thought and life and to straggle along in the old rut of her wheels, always taking up to-day what

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

she had cast off yesterday. We should not allow our cultural independence to be paralysed by the accident that at the moment Europe came in upon us, we were in a state of ebb and weakness, such as comes some day upon all civilisations. That no more proves that our spirituality, our culture, our leading ideas were entirely mistaken and the best we can do is vigorously to europeanise, rationalise, materialise ourselves in the practical parts of life,—keeping perhaps some spirituality, religion, Indianism as a graceful decoration in the background,—than the great catastrophe of the war proves that Europe's science, her democracy, her progress were all wrong and she should return to the Middle Age or imitate the culture of China or Turkey or Tibet. Such generalisations are the facile falsehoods of a hasty and unreflecting ignorance.

We have both made mistakes, faltered in the true application of our ideals, been misled into unhealthy exaggerations.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

Europe has understood the lesson, she is striving to correct herself ; but she does not for this reason forswear science, democracy, progress, but purposes to complete and perfect them, to use them better, to give them a sounder direction. She is admitting the light of the East, but on the basis of her own way of thinking and living, opening herself to truth of the spirit, but not abandoning her own truth of life and science and social ideals. We should be as faithful, as free in our dealings with the Indian spirit and modern influences ; correct what went wrong with us ; apply our spirituality on broader and freer lines, be if possible not less but more spiritual than were our forefathers ; admit western science, reason, progressiveness, the essential modern ideas, but on the basis of our own way of life and assimilated to our spiritual aim and ideal ; open ourselves to the throb of life, the pragmatic activity, the great modern endeavour. but not therefore abandon

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

our fundamental view of God and man and Nature. There is no real quarrel between them ; for rather these two things need each other to fill themselves in, to discover all their own implications, to awaken to their own richest and completest significances.

India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature. This does not mean, as some narrowly and blindly suppose, the rejection of everything new that comes to us in the stream of Time or happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible, and above all unspiritual ; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our centre, our essential way of being, our inborn nature and assimilate to it all we receive, and evolve out of it all we do and create. Religion

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

has been a central preoccupation of the Indian mind ; some have told us that too much religion ruined India, precisely because we made the whole of life religion or religion the whole of life, we have failed in life and gone under. I will not answer, adopting the language used by the poet in a slightly different connection, that our fall does not matter and that the dust in which India lies is sacred. The fall, the failure does matter, and to lie in the dust is no sound position for man or nation. But the reason assigned is not the true one. If the majority of Indians had indeed made the whole of their lives religion in the true sense of the word, we should not be where we are now ; it was because their public life became most irreligious, egoistic, self-seeking, materialistic that they fell. It is possible, that on one side we deviated too much into an excessive religiosity, that is to say, an excessive externalism of ceremony, rule, routine, mechanical worship, on the other into a

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

too world-shunning asceticism which drew away the best minds who were thus lost to society instead of standing like the ancient Rishis as its spiritual support and its illuminating life-givers. But the root of the matter was the dwindling of the spiritual impulse in its generality and broadness, the decline of intellectual activity and freedom, the waning of great ideals, the loss of the gust of life.

Perhaps there was too much of religion in one sense ; the word is English, smacks too much of things external such as creeds, rites, an external piety ; there is no one Indian equivalent. But if we give rather to religion the sense of the following of the spiritual impulse in its fullness and define spirituality as the attempt to know and live in the highest self, the divine, the all-embracing unity and to raise life in all its parts to the divinest possible values, then it is evident that there was not too much of religion, but rather too-little of it—and in what there was, a too one-



## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

sided and therefore insufficiently ample tendency. The right remedy is, not to belittle still farther the agelong ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make in very truth all the life of the nation a religion in this high spiritual sense. This is the direction in which the philosophy, poetry, art of the West is, still more or less obscurely, but with an increasing light beginning to turn, and, even some faint glints of the truth are beginning now to fall across political and sociological ideals. India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light, illumine; what was wrong and wry in her old methods she can now rectify; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer

## THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge. Whether she will rise or not to the height of her opportunity in the renaissance which is coming upon her, is the question of her destiny.

---



